

Pitfalls of 'trendy' education

PORTSTEWART, Northern Ireland — There are two ways to destroy a nation. One is from without by an invading military force. The other is from within when the people of the nation no longer embrace and promote the history, language and culture that brought it to prominence and power. Britain has chosen the second option, which is national suicide.

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In addition to its indefensible immigration policy, which is rapidly diluting British culture, the nation's public schools are giving up classical teaching in history, science and English literature in favor of trendy things to make the subject matter more "popular." It isn't working. Students increasingly find the new curriculum as unpalatable as school lunches.

According to the British think tank, Civitas, no major subject area has escaped the blight of political interference. The Civitas report is called "The Corruption of the Curriculum." It says history classes teach from speeches by Osama bin Laden and what Arab media say about Sept. 11 with no balancing material from American sources. "History has become so divorced from facts and chronology that pupils might learn the new 'skills and perspectives' through a work of fiction, such as *Lord of the Rings*," says the report.

Science classes are dominated by debates over abortion, teaching about genetic engineering and the use of nuclear power, rather than emphasizing laboratory work. In English, the pursuit of gender and racial equality has led an exam board to produce a list of modern poems from everywhere but England and Wales, where many of the greatest writers were born. The English literature exam features 32 contemporary poems and only 16 poems written prior to 1914. Exam candidates must choose two about which to write, being careful to select one from each gender (what no gay or transgender writers?).

The Civitas report says, "The traditional subject areas have been hijacked to promote fashionable causes. ... Teachers are expected to help to achieve the government's social goals instead of imparting a body of academic knowledge to their students."

The *Daily Telegraph* reports on another study which shows that attempts to make science more popular with the culturally trendy has had the opposite effect, "with pupils less interested in the subject and less keen to pursue it ... than they were under the previous, more fact-based lessons."

Private schools continue to teach the old subjects in the traditional manner and that is why what some are calling "educational apartheid" is becoming more obvious and a major concern. The study of science classes concludes that future scientists will be even more likely to come from these independent, or private

schools, because the public school courses will leave state school students ill-equipped for further study.

A nation that lacks sufficient confidence to teach the next generation its own history, culture and even science is a nation that is unlikely to mobilize the national will to resist an invading enemy.

My own theory is that prosperity has a lot to do with this jettisoning of the past. When a nation focuses on profits, instead of prophets, and sexual pleasure instead of fidelity and virtue, it dooms itself to eventual extinction.

Such attitudes also appear to be taking hold in the United States. Recently, I met a young woman who had recently graduated from an expensive American college. She told me her major was English literature with a minor in American literature. As an English major, myself, I inquired how she enjoyed studying John Milton, Edmund Spenser and my favorite Romantic poets: Byron, Shelley and Keats. She had not read them. Turning to American literature, I asked her how she liked Hemingway, Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and John Steinbeck. She hadn't read them either. Which authors had she read? "We studied a lot of writers like Maya Angelou," she replied.

British public schools are failing the next generation. American schools may not be far behind.

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